

## **International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) Mural Fact Sheet**



### **Background**

Preston based co-founders of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), Dimity Hawkins and Dave Sweeney, will be honoured by the City of Darebin with a mural at Preston Library. This will serve as an enduring inspiration for active citizenship on local and global issues.

ICAN was presented with the Nobel Peace Prize in December 2017 in recognition of its ground-breaking efforts to achieve a treaty-based prohibition of nuclear weapons, whilst drawing attention to the catastrophic consequences of using such weapons.

In order to acknowledge this extraordinary trailblazing achievement by two of our local residents, Darebin has commissioned a prominent public mural celebrating ICAN's founders and their 10-year campaign against nuclear weapons.

### **ICAN**

The **International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)** is a coalition of non-governmental organisations in over one hundred countries promoting adherence to and implementation of the United Nations nuclear weapon ban treaty. This landmark global agreement to prohibit and abolish nuclear weapons was adopted in New York on 7 July 2017.

ICAN began in Australia. Their first office was opened in Carlton in 2006 and the initiative was formally launched at the Victorian Parliament House in 2007. Since then, the campaign has been actively embraced by individuals and organisations throughout the world.

ICAN has worked to build a powerful global groundswell of public support for the abolition of nuclear weapons. By engaging a diverse range of groups and working alongside the Red Cross and like-minded governments, they have helped reshape the debate on nuclear weapons and generate real momentum towards its elimination.

### **Selection of Artist**

Council approached a number of local artists with an invitation to submit an expression of interest. A selection panel with representatives from Darebin Council, Council Officers, Arts Advisors and ICAN representative's shortlisted three artists who completed a presentation and concept design.

The committee chose local artist Hayden Dewar to develop and implement the mural.

The Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Council and the Lester family were consulted and involved in the development of the final design. The Darebin Aboriginal Advisory Committee were also consulted.

## Artist Statement from Hayden Dewar

This mural is a celebration of an organisation that is passionately concerned about the safekeeping of our planet and those who exist on it. Through visual metaphor, the mural highlights a concern for our planet that all people living on it should share, and pays tribute to a man who was impacted by nuclear weapons testing and actively and effectively worked to highlight their threat.

The visual metaphor comes in the form of a young girl's hand, holding scissors and cutting out a repeat pattern of nuclear missiles – a simple message to show care and concern for the planet by cutting out these disastrous weapons. The negative space around the missiles fades away revealing a landscape underneath.

Looking at the mural from left to right Firstly, this is the land of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people - specifically our local Merri Creek. ICAN began on Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung lands, and this pays tribute to the connection to place. In consultation with Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Elders, the creation ancestor Bunjil flies overhead. A Wurrun (Manna gum tree that the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung take their name from) branch creates a border and a new land starts. It is the land of the Yankunytjatjara people of the Western Desert in Australia. Ngintaka (the Perentie lizard) the creation ancestor for the Yankunytjatjara people sits alongside Bunjil.

The wrap around, pays tribute to Yankunytjatjara man Yami Lester. As a young boy Mr Lester was blinded by the 'black mist' that travelled to his people as a result of the British nuclear tests at Emu Junction and Maralinga in the 1950s. This deeply affected him and throughout his life he was an activist for the rights of his community and country. He worked as a welfare worker and interpreter for the courts, took a great interest in cross-cultural issues and programs, and was crucial in the establishment of the Institute for Aboriginal Development and active in the promotion of Aboriginal education and languages. Importantly Mr Lester highlighted the negative impact the 1950s nuclear tests had on his people and his actions helped lead to the McClelland Royal Commission into British Nuclear Testing in 1985. This major inquiry found "that the first bomb they let off at Emu (Totem One they called it) shouldn't have been carried out that day. The weather wasn't right, and they should have known it was too dangerous." Today there is still significant radiation hazards existing at the Maralinga test sites. The reference photo used is a powerful portrait of Yami taken by photographer Jessie Boylan. In the portrait Mr Lester's face is charged with emotion, head turned toward the sky as though receiving something beyond words. He rests on his country - the backdrop being his home at Walatina Station in North West South Australia with the desert peas in the foreground. The missiles have all faded away and this is a portrait of a man and his homeland and the beauty and value that is to be found in appreciating, respecting and caring for the land and its people.

## Connections between the Lester Family and ICAN Co-Founders

Dave Sweeney and Dimity Hawkins have worked on nuclear issues for decades in Australia. The stories that arose from the British nuclear testing in the 1950s and 1960s along with the broader stories of nuclear use and testing across the region and around the world has always informed the work of both activists. The story from Mr Lester and the on-going work of his family members in seeking recognition of the harm caused by nuclear weapons tests has been one of the important story lines that have helped focus the work of ICAN. Dave Sweeney was honoured to speak at the funeral of Mr Lester in 2017. At this time he stated,

“In a world without nuclear threat, Yami Lester would have been a great stockman. In a world with nuclear threats, he cracked his whip to sound a different alarm. We owe him a great debt. He faced adversity with understated courage, humility and strength. And he made a real and lasting difference.”

## Karina Lester and Ongoing Advocacy



**PHOTO:** Yami Lester was blinded by nuclear fallout. (Supplied: Karina Lester photographer Jessie Boylan)

Karina has made it her lifetime passion to continue telling Dad’s story and reminding fellow Australians of the impacts felt by her late Father and her people. “For decades my people and Aboriginal people of this country have been pressured to be the solution to an industry that has harmed my people for generations.” With the support of my people I will continue to speak up for our country and talk straight of the impacts and harms felt by my people for a safer and Nuclear Weapon free world for generations to come.

Today as an Ambassador for ICAN and a proud Yankunytjatjara woman I will raise awareness of the great work of ICAN and the importance of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, not only to my people but across this Nation.

“This mural is a moving tribute to a great man, a man I call Dad”

Darebin Council has invited Karina, Leroy and Rosemary and Lucy to the opening of the Mural.

## Why is a Yankunytjatjara Elder Portrayed on the Mural?

The mural will celebrate ICAN and also pay tribute to Yankunytjatjara Elder, Yami Lester, whose activism was an inspiration and call to action for the ICAN co-founders. Mr Lester was tireless in highlighting the hidden history of nuclear testing in Australia, and was one of the key people to push for a Royal Commission into British Nuclear Testing in the mid 1980s. The life-long dedication of Mr Lester to the work to seek acknowledgement of the impacts of the nuclear weapons tests on people and the environment left a legacy of strong commitment that continues through the work of ICAN and his own family members.

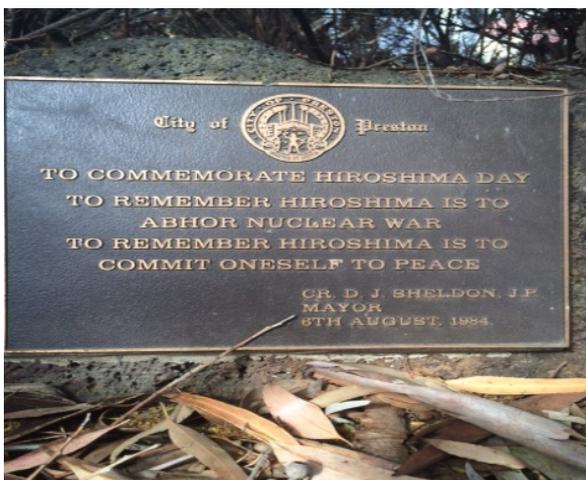
Between 1952 – 1957, a total of 12 atmospheric nuclear tests were carried out by the British in Australia in Monte Bello in WA and Emu Field and Maralinga in South Australia. A further 600 ‘minor trials’ of nuclear components, including radioactive and toxic materials, were carried out until 1963 also. Fallout from the major tests spread across Australia.

## Chosen Site the Preston Library

The ICAN Mural Committee Panel felt that this building offered the best option, as it has completely plain brick rectangular walls on the Kelvin Grove side that are quite publicly visible not far from the main entry forecourt. As a well loved and used public facility in a civic space it is a suitably appropriate and respectful location.

The library is important as a place of learning and it is directly across the road from the newly opened Preston High School. It is hoped that the mural will be both generator of curiosity and a call to action. The library is ordering a number of books about ICAN, the effects of nuclear testing on Australians, Mr Lester and other activists. A number of educational resources are also being created.

There is also a commemorative plaque in the garden bed at the Preston Library, commemorating Hiroshima Day in 1984. This plaque shows the long-term concerns the City of Darebin has with the issue of nuclear weapons. This will be placed nearer to the mural location.





## **ICAN representatives Dimity Hawkins and Dave Sweeney**

The mural created by artist Hayden Dewar and commissioned by the Darebin Council, is a lasting monument to citizen engagement and community concern about nuclear weapons. The emphasis on the Australian place in the ICAN story is important, and is the first public monument to the work of ICAN in its home town. Paying tribute to First Nations – from the founding of ICAN on Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Country to the story of the Lester family in the British bomb tests is central to our work and continues to inform the campaign. The courage and clarity of the voices of survivors has been central to the work of ICAN and a particular motivator for ICAN Australia.

Dave Sweeney has been actively involved in nuclear, resource and Aboriginal issues for three decades. He has worked closely with affected communities and civil society groups on campaigns around uranium mining, nuclear weapons and nuclear waste. He has a vision of an Australia that is nuclear free, confident about its future and honest about its past.

Dimity Hawkins is a long-term campaigner on nuclear weapons issues and is a current PhD candidate at Swinburne University. She was a founding member of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons and continues to campaign on issues of nuclear testing and nuclear weapons abolition.

*Darebin City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the traditional owners and custodians of this land and pay respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.*

*Council also acknowledges the leadership of Yankunytjatjara man Yami Lester and the ongoing work of his family and pays respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.*

Additional thanks to the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation and the Darebin Aboriginal Advisory Committee.